



**1stLt Robinson**

**Ragin' Cajun enlists with GED, goes after master's degree**

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*Story by Sgt. Juan Vara*

**AL ASAD, Iraq** -- In January 1996, a young man from New Orleans enlisted in the Marine Corps without a high school diploma. Less than six years later he had a college degree and was a second lieutenant. He wasn't done.

Taking advantage of the opportunities service members have to continue their education, 1st Lt. Jeremy A. Robinson traded his stripes and crossed rifles for gold bars almost four years ago. It wasn't easy, but his hard work and perseverance paid off and have changed his life in ways he never imagined.

In 1994, when his mother was diagnosed with cancer, Robinson dropped out of high school and took up several jobs to sustain the family. Interested in bettering himself, he got a General Education Development certificate from the state of Louisiana and attended Delgado Community College for a year. In January 1996 he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Upon completion of basic training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S.C., he was meritoriously promoted to private first class. He later completed Marine Combat Training, a course on basic infantry skills, where he was meritoriously promoted to lance corporal.

After becoming an aviation maintenance administrative clerk, Robinson traveled to Okinawa, Japan, and reported to Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265. While serving with HMM-265, without even one year in the Corps, he was promoted to corporal.

To learn more about the aircraft for which he was maintaining records, he began

flying as an aerial observer on CH-46E Sea Knights. He accumulated approximately 100 flight-hours before his return to the United States.

His second unit was Marine Aviation Training Support Group 21, in Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Fla., where he served as an operations clerk. On his off time, mostly at night, he attended Pensacola Junior College.

The operations officer in the unit, a prior-enlisted Marine who had reached the rank of gunnery sergeant before becoming a warrant officer and moving up to the rank of lieutenant colonel, noticed Robinson's interest in education.

"He noticed I was taking classes at night and knocking out my homework at lunch time and counseled me about putting in a package for the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program (MECEP)," said Robinson.

Robinson, hungry for more knowledge, followed the advice and was one of approximately 50 corporals to get selected for the program. Prior to leaving the unit, in less than four years of service, he was promoted to sergeant.

Auburn University welcomed Robinson in 1999. In August 2001 he received a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and was commissioned a second lieutenant.

After completing aviation maintenance officers' school he joined Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 26, based at Marine Corps Air Station, New River, N.C., and served as the airframes division officer.

In November 2003 he joined his current unit, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264, as the maintenance material control officer. Juggling the workload of a unit that has been constantly deploying in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, he continued working on the aerial observer syllabus and received the aircrew wing insignia on April 1.

"That was a great feeling," he said. "Finally finishing what I started and receiving my wings nine years later, as an officer."

In Iraq since earlier this year, Robinson has raked up approximately 100 flight-hours with about 80 of those being in combat missions. He now wears the combat aircrew wing insignia, a device that recognizes the job done by aircrew personnel in combat.

"Flying is great," he said. "I missed it. I got all caught up with my training but by flying here I feel like I contributed to the entire effort."

Robinson, recently selected for promotion to captain, is scheduled to return to the U.S. and report to MALS-42 in Marietta, Ga. Not completely done with his education goals, he plans to attend law school at Georgia State University for his

master's degree.

"Why get out of the Marine Corps and go to school when you can take advantage of the programs the Marine Corps offers," said Robinson. "[The Meritorious Enlisted Commissioning Education Program] is a great opportunity for Marines who have some college background and are looking to enhance their professional development while still wearing the uniform. The Marine Corps opened the door for me, but MECEP changed my life forever."

- For more information about the Marine reported on in this story, please contact Sgt. Juan Vara by e-mail at [varaj@acemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil](mailto:varaj@acemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil) -